



Religious Action Center
of Reform Judaism

URL: <http://rac.org/PrintItem/index.cfm?id=1075&type=Articles>

Reform Jewish Leader Responds to President Bush's Budget

On February 7, President Bush released his Fiscal Year 2006 budget. In response, Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism issued the following statement noting, "If the federal budget is to reflect those values, the U.S. Congress must craft a budget that cares for America's children, elderly, sick and, poor--and above all secures an American future in which equity, justice and compassion are at the center of our national life."

Saperstein: If the federal budget is to reflect those values, the U.S. Congress must craft a budget that cares for America's children, elderly, sick and, poor--and above all secures an American future in which equity, justice and compassion are at the center of our national life.

WASHINGTON, February 8, 2006 – On Monday morning, February 7, President Bush released his Fiscal Year 2006 budget. In response, Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism issued the following statement:

The budget is the great moral document of our nation, setting forth the government's priorities and values for the coming year and beyond. It is fair, therefore, to ask what values are, and are not, being advanced in this year's budget. Although the full details of what the President has proposed will take some time to digest, much is already clear.

First, the Fiscal Year 2006 budget does not adequately reflect the value of "compassion," about which the President has spoken so movingly. By funding education, health care, and job training social service programs below the cost of inflation, the President is—in effect—reducing their budgets. As the cost of these programs continues to rise with inflation, funding will remain stagnant under the President's plan, dooming them to reduced efficacy in the face of greater need. For the many social service programs already straining to meet the needs of America's most vulnerable citizens, these budget cuts will make their work even more difficult. At the same time, we recognize and applaud those aspects of the budget that do advance values such as new funding for the Ryan White CARE Act's AIDS/HIV research and increased funding for addressing the international AIDS crisis. The budget also shows an admirable effort to increase foreign aid and meet our nation's existing commitment to debt cancellation for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries, which should be further expanded upon so that nations struggling under crushing debt payments can invest their scarce funds to develop their own infrastructures.

Second, the budget does not reflect the values expressed in Jewish tradition of concern for *r'fu'at hanefesh v'r'fu'at ha'guf*, the repair of spirit and body. As our great sage Maimonides teaches us,

health care is not just an obligation of the doctor and patient but of society as a whole. While the President diminishes our social safety net and endangers the educational competitiveness of America's children, his budget also makes severe cuts to the Medicaid program. Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt has said the President plans \$60 billion in Medicaid cuts over the next ten years, and the FY 2006 budget reflects this intent. Despite the Administration's claims about the program's rising costs, Medicaid costs have actually grown more slowly than private insurance costs. As any health care professional knows, preventative care is far cheaper than emergency care. Cutting this program that serves almost one-fifth of Americans and sixty percent of nursing home patients will only hurt our nation's long-term health: swelling the ranks of the uninsured, straining our emergency rooms, and burdening families with the high costs of nursing care.

Third, what values support the budget's call to make permanent the massive tax cuts passed in the last few years that have shifted the tax burden onto the middle class and cut taxes for the wealthiest American citizens while the working poor struggle to make ends meet with increasingly less assistance from much-needed federal programs? The President's FY '06 budget proposes funding cuts for and, in some cases, the complete elimination of critical social service programs relied upon by millions of Americans. And despite the President's pledge to leave no child behind, education programs represent nearly one-third of the programs targeted for program cuts. Our nation's children and their schools are ill-served by a \$4.3 billion reduction in funding or the President's plan to provide private schools, including religious schools, with up to \$50 million in taxpayer money.

Finally, there is, at times, a troubling disconnect between the President's rhetoric and his proposals. For example, last year, the President signed into law the Innocence Protection Act, which included authorization of \$375 million over five years for the training of adequate legal representation for capital cases. The President touted this initiative in his State of the Union Address, yet included in his budget only \$50 million over three years. At the same time, a federal budget that does not include the huge allocations for ongoing military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, the cost of the President's Social Security reform proposals and needed changes to the alternative minimum tax which unreasonably burdens middle class taxpayers is a budget that does not allow Congress and the American people to analyze and debate the full repercussions of his proposal.

Our religious tradition teaches all to open our hands to those in need. If the federal budget is to reflect those values, the U.S. Congress must craft a budget that cares for America's children, elderly, sick and, poor--and above all secures an American future in which equity, justice and compassion are at the center of our national life.

###

The **Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism** is the Washington office of the **Union for Reform Judaism**, whose more than **900 congregations** across North America encompass **1.5 million Reform Jews**, and the **Central Conference of American Rabbis**, whose membership includes more than **1800 Reform rabbis**.

